

## PREPARING CLOTHES FOR A BON TANTRIC PRACTITIONER'S AFTERLIFE

Klu thar rgyal ལུ་ཐར་རྒྱལ།

In 2007, I experienced a funeral when I was attending junior middle school and visiting my aunt's home in Stong che (Dangche) Valley in Khri ka (Guide) County.

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After I had been spinning an old wooden-handled *ma Ni* prayer wheel for some time, a local visitor came and replaced me. I had been spinning it since arriving from my boarding junior middle school in the late afternoon. Clan members and fellow villagers wore sad expressions in a house silent except for the whirl of spinning prayer wheels, a monk's chant, the murmurs of other locals chanting *ma Ni*, and frequent sighs from the family.

That night, my aunt was busy in a room under dim light. She wore a sad expression and told me she was preparing clothes for her deceased father-in-law, a Bon tantric practitioner known for his healing powers, who often wore old clothes, and wrapped his head in a long red cloth. When I was a child, my front teeth had ached and moved visibly. My aunt noticed my swollen chin and took me to her father-in-law, who was going somewhere. He stopped, told me to open my mouth, and blew into my mouth several times after taking a deep breath. Drops of his saliva entered my mouth each time he blew. I felt cool, and to my surprise, I never had another toothache.

After a while, the local men formed a line from the room with the deceased to the yard gate. They tightly gripped each other's arms. Four clan members carried a coffin on a stretcher, moving with the coffin along the line of the local men. Clan women, including my aunt, screamed, "Father!!!" and rushed at the departing coffin, but they couldn't break through the line of men tightly gripping each other's

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arms. They wailed more loudly behind the men. As the coffin carriers left the yard, all the men followed and closed the yard gate tightly behind them, so no women could come out. I and some male teenagers followed the coffin carriers.

Men took turns carrying the coffin. I also carried the coffin for a while. It was not as heavy as I had imagined. After about an hour of walking, we reached the gravesite in the middle of a mountain.

The grave was three meters deep, with a cavity in one side at the bottom of the grave. Some men lowered the coffin into the grave and carefully pushed it into the side cavity. An older man who had remained in the grave, placed a butter lamp in the cavity and loudly proclaimed, "Uncle Tantric Practitioner, don't be afraid. We have prepared clothes for you. Don't look back and keep going! Don't be distracted by evils! Don't worry about the family. We will chant and pray for you!"

After the man climbed out of the grave, my aunt's husband, who was the deceased's only son, stepped forward with a shovel, held his breath, and tossed three shovelfuls of soil on top of the coffin without looking at the coffin. Clan members joined him and after filling the grave within a few minutes, piled a mound of soil on top of the grave. After making three prostrations in front of the grave, we all headed back to the deceased's home.

I heard only the sounds of the men's steps.

#### TIBETAN TERMS

khri ka ཁྱི་ཀ་

klu thar rgyal ལུ་ཐར་རྒྱལ་

stong che སྟོང་ཅེ།

#### CHINESE TERMS

Dangche 当车

Guide 贵德